

"ONE NATION, UNDER GOD...?"

(Psalm 115:1-11)

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***--I--America's Spiritual Heritage & Today's Danger--***

1. Read Text: Psalm 115:1-11 and Pray.
2. [WATCH VIDEO "*Independence Day Mini-Movie*" (CreativeMediaSolutions) (Time 2:42), featuring quotes from Founding Fathers, Presidents and Supreme Court Justices -- found online at <https://vimeo.com/171821783>]
3. "*Utopia.*" "*Heaven on earth.*" "*The New Israel!*" "*Home of the free and the brave.*" -- these are just of the few names people have given to America over the last few centuries.

A--We were a land where people came (among other things) seeking haven from religious persecution -- where they could live & work and worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience, rather than by the mandates of their government.

1--As you've seen from the opening video, from its beginning, America was founded upon a profoundly spiritual heritage,...

2--...And has practiced the words of Verse 9 in today's scripture by allowing God to be our "*help and shield*" -- we've put our "*trust in the Lord*" <sup>1</sup> -- we've lived out the words of Verse 1: "*Not to us, Lord, not to us -- no, but to your own name give glory.*"

B--And I believe that we've remained great as a nation thus far because we've remained true to our Founders' views of the world and of humanity which had at its foundation a profoundly religious and spiritual faith.

4. Yet, I fear that in many ways, we here in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America are in danger of losing that which has made us great to this point.

A--Today we face issues and attitudes that are tearing at our national fabric,

threatening to divide us in ways we've not experienced for many generations. <sup>2</sup>

B--And, unlike the value as a young nation that we placed on diversity and basic respect towards others, today we face increasing intolerance and *lack of* charity and civility towards those who think and act differently than us.

***--II--David's Warning Vs. National Idol Worship--***

5. Well, in today's scripture reading from Psalm 115, we find King David warning his country Israel about these very dangers, as well.

A--In Verse 4 he tells them not to be like other nations who worship "*idols [of] silver and gold, things made by human hands -- [Idols which]... have mouthed but they can't speak, ...eyes, but they can't see; ...ears, but they can't hear,... hands and feet, but do not feel or walk*" -- in other words "gods" which have no *real* power.

B--And Verse 8 says that those "*who made these idols and all who trust in them [should] become just like them!*"

6. And so this leads me to wonder: ...**What are the "idols" worshiped by American culture today...** things that have no *real* power other than what we give by our own imagination? <sup>3</sup>

A--I'm not talking about the winners of the now defunct TV show. No, what I'm asking is: What are the things that you and I as a society too often find ourselves worshipping *instead* of God?

1--Is it success? popularity? the stock market? our work? our possessions?

2--Our military (necessary though it is)? the almighty Dollar? TV? the Internet?

3--What about sports? (Do you know the difference between a "fan" and a "fanatic"? A "fan" is someone who jumps up and down screaming and yelling for their team at a sports game. A "fanatic" is someone who claps or says "Amen" in church! It's a commentary on how much more excited most of us are about our sports than about our faith!)

4--These are the *real* "American Idols" that we worship instead of God.

B--You know, in the "*Pledge of Allegiance*" to our American flag, we still affirm that we are "*one Nation under God.*"

C--But are we REALLY? ...As a nation, is our trust *truly* in GOD? Or do we more often trust idols/gods which are *other than* Almighty God?

7. You see, today's scripture warns us (like King David warned the Israelites) that if we worship these other things -- that is, if we come to rely on them for our happiness and contentment -- then we actually *become like* them.

A--David is saying that rather than being people with the freedom to *choose* how we live our lives, we become so controlled by our reliance and trust in these other things that we ourselves *become* idols with "*faces and hands and feet,*" yet unable to truly *live* as children of freedom like God intended.

B--He's saying that, far from giving us freedom, the "idols" of national culture -- things like our advanced technology, our military might or economic power -- can actually *enslave us* and cause us to become one of those "*other nations*" that he warns against.

1--Now don't get me wrong -- as a country, we can (& I believe *should*) use many of these things as *tools* to be bearers of justice in and for our world.

2--But we dare not *rely* on them so heavily for our happiness, contentment, and security that we find ourselves actually *worshiping* them. <sup>4</sup>

### **--III--Solution to Our National Dilemma--**

8. So, if we as a nation are in danger of losing the spiritual identity which gave us our greatness to begin with, then how do we go about setting things right today?

A--Quite simply, the answer lies with every one of us who goes by the name "Christian": we not only have the *right* but more importantly the *responsibility* to become knowledgeable *about* (and then stand up *for*) America's spiritual heritage through our words and deeds -- and to do so in *all* arenas of society (both private *and* public).

B--As you saw in the words of the opening video, America's founders didn't buy into the myth (assumed by many of today) which says that faith is merely a "private matter" -- it's true that many of them *were NOT* orthodox Christian church-goers by today's standards, but *neither* were they hard-bitten secularists who believed that faith had no place in the public arena. <sup>5</sup>

C--Instead, they knew that faith which does not make itself publicly known is no real faith at all-- in the words of today's scripture, it's merely an "idol" that "*has eyes, but can't see; ears and can't hear; hands, but can't feel*" (i.e., it's powerless, and hence it's not *real* faith at all!).

D--In Matthew 5, Jesus tells his followers (us) these words: "*You [meaning people of faith] are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise [not to the government, but] your Father who is in heaven*" (Verses 14-16).

9. So, let me wrap up simply by saying that as we celebrate our July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday later this week, I want to challenge us not to hide or be embarrassed by the "light" of our faith.

A--Instead, we first need to remember and be publicly thankful for the ways that God has blessed us as a nation throughout our past.

B--But then we also need to be challenged to once again become knowledgeable advocates for that spiritual heritage both for the sake of our present and our future.

C--As Christians, you see, you and I are called to take up David's cry for *his* people in Verses 1 and 9 and make it *our own*, so that it echoes throughout *our* land today:

*"Not to us, Lord, not to us -- no, but to your own name give glory! O, Israel [O America], trust in the Lord! For He is [your] help and your shield."*

D--I believe that it is only when we do this, both as individuals and as a society, that America will *truly* be "*One Nation Under God!*"

11. [CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER TIME FOR AMERICA, ending with...]

*..."O God, we believe that you brought forth our country to be a shining light of freedom and justice for and to the rest of the world. But you brought us forth so that we might show forth YOUR glory & YOUR love, as well. Forgive us for those times and places where we as a nation have turned from your ways to worship idols of our own hands. Forgive us for often ignoring the truth that YOU are the one who made us great, and that without you, we are nothing. Speak to each of us here today, and teach us what WE can help you do to once again enable America to truly be 'One Nation Under God.' For its in your holy name and we pray, Amen."*

**ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Something our currency still affirms (at least in theory) in its words "*in God we trust.*"

<sup>2</sup> Issues such as how to address and deal with: abortion; immigration; violent crime; the war on terror; the changing nature and definition of the traditional family, and others.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that America's "idols" are *not* idols made of "wood" or "clay" (which I believe represent "idols" often found in what are called "Two-Thirds World" countries). Instead, American idols are "idols" of "*silver and gold*"-- things worshiped by those who are more affluent (like computers, fancy cars, nice homes, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> And remember, too, that the forbearers of our own country in the past were quick to give credit *to God* for our national "blessings" and "successes," rather than our contemporary tendency to claim credit *for ourselves*.

<sup>5</sup> It's true that not all of America's founders were orthodox Christians by today's standards. But it fair to say that they were men and women of profound spiritual faith, and that that faith both inspired and motivated much of what they accomplished. As a history major in college, I recognize that there were other forces at work in the formation and advancement of American history other than religion (i.e., economics, politics, greed, glory). However, as a person of faith I do not believe that these other forces could have made as large an impact upon America's history and heritage had God's hand not allowed it to be so.